

**42 USC 1996: Protection and preservation of traditional religions of Native Americans**

Text contains those laws in effect on May 8, 2023

**From Title 42-THE PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELFARE**

CHAPTER 21-CIVIL RIGHTS

SUBCHAPTER I-GENERALLY

**Jump To:**[Source Credit](#)[Miscellaneous](#)[Short Title](#)[Executive Documents](#)**§1996. Protection and preservation of traditional religions of Native Americans**

On and after August 11, 1978, it shall be the policy of the United States to protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise the traditional religions of the American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut, and Native Hawaiians, including but not limited to access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and the freedom to worship through ceremonials and traditional rites.

( Pub. L. 95–341, §1, Aug. 11, 1978, 92 Stat. 469 .)

**STATUTORY NOTES AND RELATED SUBSIDIARIES****SHORT TITLE OF 1994 AMENDMENT**

Pub. L. 103–344, §1, Oct. 6, 1994, 108 Stat. 3125 , provided that: "This Act [enacting section 1996a of this title] may be cited as the 'American Indian Religious Freedom Act Amendments of 1994'."

**SHORT TITLE**

Pub. L. 95–341, as amended, which enacted this section, [section 1996a of this title](#), and a provision set out as a note under this section, is popularly known as the American Indian Religious Freedom Act.

**FEDERAL IMPLEMENTATION OF PROTECTIVE AND PRESERVATION FUNCTIONS RELATING TO NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CULTURAL RIGHTS AND PRACTICES; PRESIDENTIAL REPORT TO CONGRESS**

Pub. L. 95–341, §2, Aug. 11, 1978, 92 Stat. 470 , provided that the President direct the various Federal departments, agencies, and other instrumentalities responsible for administering relevant laws to evaluate their policies and procedures in consultation with native traditional religious leaders to determine changes necessary to preserve Native American religious cultural rights and practices and report to the Congress 12 months after Aug. 11, 1978.

**EXECUTIVE DOCUMENTS****EX. ORD. NO. 13007. INDIAN SACRED SITES**

Ex. Ord. No. 13007, May 24, 1996, 61 F.R. 26771, provided:

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, in furtherance of Federal treaties, and in order to protect and preserve Indian religious practices, it is hereby ordered:

**SECTION 1. Accommodation of Sacred Sites.** (a) In managing Federal lands, each executive branch agency with

statutory or administrative responsibility for the management of Federal lands shall, to the extent practicable, permitted by law, and not clearly inconsistent with essential agency functions, (1) accommodate access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites by Indian religious practitioners and (2) avoid adversely affecting the physical integrity of such sacred sites. Where appropriate, agencies shall maintain the confidentiality of sacred sites.

(b) For purposes of this order:

(i) "Federal lands" means any land or interests in land owned by the United States, including leasehold interests held by the United States, except Indian trust lands;

(ii) "Indian tribe" means an Indian or Alaska Native tribe, band, nation, pueblo, village, or community that the Secretary of the Interior acknowledges to exist as an Indian tribe pursuant to Public Law No. 103-454, 108 Stat. 4791 [see 25 U.S.C. 5130, 5131], and "Indian" refers to a member of such an Indian tribe; and

(iii) "Sacred site" means any specific, discrete, narrowly delineated location on Federal land that is identified by an Indian tribe, or Indian individual determined to be an appropriately authoritative representative of an Indian religion, as sacred by virtue of its established religious significance to, or ceremonial use by, an Indian religion; provided that the tribe or appropriately authoritative representative of an Indian religion has informed the agency of the existence of such a site.

SEC. 2. *Procedures.* (a) Each executive branch agency with statutory or administrative responsibility for the management of Federal lands shall, as appropriate, promptly implement procedures for the purposes of carrying out the provisions of section 1 of this order, including, where practicable and appropriate, procedures to ensure reasonable notice is provided of proposed actions or land management policies that may restrict future access to or ceremonial use of, or adversely affect the physical integrity of, sacred sites. In all actions pursuant to this section, agencies shall comply with the Executive memorandum of April 29, 1994, "Government-to-Government Relations with Native American Tribal Governments" [25 U.S.C. 5301 note].

(b) Within 1 year of the effective date of this order, the head of each executive branch agency with statutory or administrative responsibility for the management of Federal lands shall report to the President, through the Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, on the implementation of this order. Such reports shall address, among other things, (i) any changes necessary to accommodate access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites; (ii) any changes necessary to avoid adversely affecting the physical integrity of Indian sacred sites; and (iii) procedures implemented or proposed to facilitate consultation with appropriate Indian tribes and religious leaders and the expeditious resolution of disputes relating to agency action on Federal lands that may adversely affect access to, ceremonial use of, or the physical integrity of sacred sites.

SEC. 3. Nothing in this order shall be construed to require a taking of vested property interests. Nor shall this order be construed to impair enforceable rights to use of Federal lands that have been granted to third parties through final agency action. For purposes of this order, "agency action" has the same meaning as in the Administrative Procedure Act (5 U.S.C. 551(13)).

SEC. 4. This order is intended only to improve the internal management of the executive branch and is not intended to, nor does it, create any right, benefit, or trust responsibility, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or equity by any party against the United States, its agencies, officers, or any person.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON.